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Peer student dialogue in thesis writing: A possibility to consider

In her article, focusing on student-teacher dialogue in Web-enhanced writing classes, Magdalena Szczyrbak rightly observes that this kind of interaction has a long history in more conventional educational settings and activities. An evident example is the traditional process of thesis writing, in which the author and the supervisor are involved in variously structured interaction. From the modern perspective, the supervisor should be a facilitator and a partner rather than an authority, whose main role is to give instructions on the form, offer suggestions on the content and proofread the text to some extent. Since the student's passivity (of whatever origin) may impede initiative on his or her part, it goes without saying that the teacher's facilitation in the process of knowledge acquisition and writing itself may require different degrees of guidance and the employment of various techniques in the process.

In this connection one may ask a question to what extent peer student cooperation could be involved in the production of licentiate or MA theses as a technique counteracting student passivity. It is highly probable that some motivated students exchange ideas on their projects even without any active encouragement on the part of the supervisor. Thus, given the modern approach to education, could the teacher purposefully and formally facilitate his or her students' cooperation in that area? If so, the student-teacher dialogue could be supplemented with guided consultations between students working in pairs, with the teacher acting as a coordinator. The procedure would have to follow clearly specified general rules. One of them might require that a pair should consist of students working in relatively different areas, to prevent plagiarizing of ideas. Another rule would specify the mode in which peer comments on the contents and form are exchanged. A further one would determine the supervisor's access to those remarks and the manner in which he or she reacts to them. Such a procedure would definitely foster the students' autonomy, stimulate their cognitive curiosity and reflection, increase their involvement in decision making and provide them with a valuable experience of cooperation. Such student collaboration in thesis writing would also imply a shift of authority from the teacher to the learners. The supportive contribution of a peer student might even be acknowledged in the thesis by its author. After all, do not numerous books written by serious scholars owe much of their excellence to the fact that they were read and commented on by other experts in the field before going to print?